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FOR A BIT OF HAPPINESS

DRAMA IN 3 ACTS
and 4 SCENES

by

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CHARACTERS:

ALVIN PHILIPS

MATHILDA - - - - - - - - - - his wife

BEATRICE - - - - - - - - - - their child

CLAIRE - - - - - - - - - - their friend

HERSH DEXTER - - - - - - - -) Mathilda's parents

ANNA DEXTER - - - - - - - -)

NANCY - - - - - - - - - - - Mathilda's sister

DAVID - - - - - - - - - - - her husband

DANIEL SHELLEN

A WOMAN

A NURSE

A YOUNG GIRL

A POLICEMAN

NEIGHBORS

PRESENT TIME

AMERICA

A C T O N E

A breakfast room in a modern apartment house near the sea shore. At the left side there is seen a kitchenette which is parted by a curtain when not in use.

Alvin and Beatrice are seated at the table finishing supper. While Alvin and Mathilda speak, the child seems to be busy playing with some toys, or she goes out into the second room.

Mathilda: (wears a bathing suit under a smock, brings over some dessert to the table) Here, finish this and stop making remarks for a while. I have never seen a man so jealous. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, honest.

Alvin: Why, no, Mathilda. It isn't that at all. It is merely not nice.

Mathilda: Why not? What did we come to the seashore for?

Alvin: But walking around the whole day in a bathing suit is quite enough. You can sleep in it, if you please, but at least for supper a person should have manners enough to put on a dress instead.

Mathilda: It is quite good manners to wear a bathing suit whenever you feel like (significantly) if you have the shape to wear one. I guess that's what the trouble is with you men; you like to be attracted by some other man's wife, but not by your own.

Alvin: Going around like that is no attraction - it's vulgarity

Mathilda: You never like what everybody does. You think you are clever, don't you? But you are not going to make me follow all your nonsense. I am young, and I am going to live as everybody does.

Alvin: (pensively) Yes, as everybody does... But these everybodies are like monkeys - they do what you do, and you by doing what they do, only imitate yourself, believing that you follow the majority. It is from that monkey circle that we must escape. If you could only know how much more pleasant things are the other way...

Mathilda: Don't lecture me, please. You wouldn't find any faults with Claire although her bathing suit is just as much abbreviated as mine.

Alvin: I would not care if you walked around naked, provided there would be the gleam of delight and joy in your eyes while absorbing the sun's rays, but your eyes reveal something else. You would expose your body in response to any sensual, lustful look, even to that of a leper. There are many different ways of doing things, Mathilda. Yes, Claire, too, wears a bathing suit, but she knows when, and why. It isn't what you do, but how you do it. Will you ever understand that?

Mathilda: Your second wife might be willing to understand such things, but I want to live my own way, and I am going to.

Alvin: Oh, well, what is the use of talking? Some day I'll save myself that trouble. I'll leave you, Mathilda. It might be that you will regret it, but it will be too late.

Mathilda: Regret what? The pleasure of being reproached for the least little thing? Just do it. (she gathers the dishes quickly and puts them into the sink unwashed).

Alvin: You will be surprised, Mathilda, to discover some day a longing even for these reproaches. We begin with minor things, walking blindly; and before we look around, we are in the midst of a violent stream being carried away straight to the devil. You don't fear it as much as I do, because you don't see it. But I do, and it hurts, painfully; but some day I'll settle it all, and then first you will begin to feel it.

Mathilda: What may happen nobody knows, but it's true, though, that what you don't see - does not hurt, and I prefer rather not to see things as you do. At any rate, not now. I guess, we'd better stop arguing: nothing will ever come of it. Just let me have some change: I am going to the movies with Nancy.

Alvin: (gives her some money)

Mathilda: That's the way I like you be - now let me give you a kiss for being so good

Alvin: (slightly repulsing her) Please, don't...

(a young girl hurries in)

Girl: You are wanted on the telephone Mr. Philips.

Alvin: (makes way to go)

Mathilda: I'll answer it. I am going down anyhow.

Alvin: I don't need any representatives. I'll answer my own telephone calls.

Mathilda: But it must be Nancy: she probably wants to speak to me. We are going to the movies tonight.

Alvin: (to the girl) Who is calling, Eva, a man or a woman?

Girl: A man wants to talk to you, Mr. Philips.

Alvin: (looks at Mathilda significantly and goes out)

Mathilda: (to the girl) If you can't take a message, you should not answer the phone. Don't be so good-natured.

Girl: But the telephone is not yours, Mrs. Philips. The telephone in the hall belongs to every tenant.

Mathilda: Don't be so smart. Move, you little fool. Come on.

Girl: Next time I'll hang up when there's a call for you. (she goes out)

Alvin: (comes in after a while, and sits down near the table)

Mathilda: Well? Who was it?

Alvin: I suppose you know better who he is. Well, why don't you go?

Mathilda: Of course, I will. Bye-bye (goes out)

Alvin: (Observes the dishes in the sink, then turns to the child that came in from the second room)
Now, what do you say, Beatrice, will you too...
(Mr. and Mrs. Dexter come in, they say "Hello" and make themselves at home)

Mr. Dex: (speaks slowly, expressingly, in a sing song manner, as one taking pleasure in the tone of his speech more than the matter concerned) Where is Mathilda? Has she gone anywhere?

Alvin: Yes, she has. I just thought of going for a walk myself. Would you mind if I go?

Mr. Dex: Don't let us keep you back.

Alvin: I'll be back in a few minutes (he looks thru the window hesitatingly and he goes out)

Mrs. Dex: Always on the go. No time to stay a couple of minutes, even when parents come around.

Mr. Dex: Seems as if one can't be much in love with his family-in-law, when one doesn't live in peace with his wife.

Mrs. Dex: Much has he to kick about his wife (deprecatingly) Look at that shrimp Pauline with her big feet who drives an expensive car, people are lucky, I should say, and we have no right even...

Mr. Dex: To want a tiny little car

Mrs. Dex I suppose you know what I mean

Mr. Dex: Do I? It's about time, deary, that I should be able to read your mind.

Mrs. Dex: And do nothing about it.

Mr. Dex: I might as well take it easy. Why, if for thirty years I could stand your talking and do nothing about it, I don't see any sense in getting excited now. It's him, Alvin, who gets excited, poor devil. Yeh... seems as if daughters take after their mothers. There - she has a passion for washing dishes just as you have

he-he-he (to Beatrice) Now let's hope, little Beatie, that you will have more desire to wash dishes.

Beatrice: (joyfully) Oh, I like to wash. Let me do it, grandpa.

Mr. Dex: Wait until you grow up. Now listen to the new story I made up specially for you (he hugs her) You see, you little Beatie!

Beatrice: A story about a monkey with a tail?

Mr. Dex: No, no. Now it is going to be about a snake and a spider.

Beatrice: He - a spider?? What is a spider?

Mr. Dex: Well, how shall I explain it to you... A spider is something, let's say... what creature should we compare it with... Well, let's say, something (points suddenly to Mrs. Dexter) like a Grandma

Beatrice: (quick) I know, I know - and what is a snake?

Mr. Dex: Oh, a snake is something big

Beatrice: A big, big one (she stretches her hands full length) like this?

Mr. Dex: Still bigger.

Beatrice: Like my mother?

Mr. Dex: Well, your mother is only a little bit of a snake; she might within time grow into a regular snake.

Beatrice: Sure (Both laugh. A knock at the door is heard)

Mrs. Dex: Come in.

Daniel: (comes in) Good evening. Is... Mr. Philips at home?

Mr. Dex: He left a couple of minutes ago. Take a seat; he'll be back soon.

Daniel: No thanks. I have no time to wait. I'll be here some other time.

Mr. Dex: Why, you should have met him. He stepped out just a while ago.

Daniel: Oh, that was him... oh yes, I thought so, but I wasn't quite sure. He was quite a distance away. Well, I guess I'll go.

Mr. Dex: Who shall we tell him was here?

Daniel: It isn't very important. Good night (goes out)

Mrs. Dex: You might say what you like, but this young man looks suspicious to me.

Mr. Dex: I won't say that, but I don't like his looks. I should say rather.... What do you say, Beatie?

Beatrice: Is this man a snake?

Mr. Dex: He might be - he-he-he...

Mrs. Dex: Stop joking like that. I guess it's about time to go.

Mathilda: (comes in) Hello, mother, and how is father? I am glad you are here.

Mrs. Dex: Since we are here, you might as well say so, though you have never taken any trouble to invite us.

Mathilda: Parents are welcome any time they come. No special invitation is needed. If I didn't have to meet somebody, I would certainly stay with you a while. But we can take a walk together on the boardwalk, anyhow. I'll just put the child to bed and put on a dress. (she goes into the bedroom with Beatrice)

Mr. Dex: I think Nancy and David are coming here too.

Mathilda: (from the other room) I am sorry, but I have no time to wait. We'll have to meet them on the way.

Mr. Dex: But you can't go away and leave the child alone.

Mathilda: Alvin is coming in soon. I am sure he is coming in soon. He wouldn't go too far.

Mr. Dex: Don't be so sure. There - some young man was asking for him a while ago.

Mathilda: (coming in from the other room, putting on adress) You mean for Alvin?

Mr. Dex: So he said, but he wouldn't tell his name, looked fishy to me.

Mathilda: I guess we should go... to find... Alvin

Mr. Dex: Very well, then, let's go (all go out)

The Girl: (Steps in furtively soon after they leave the room. She calls whisperingly into the second room) Mr. Philips (she looks hesitatingly into the second room: seeing no one, she murmurs to herself) I'll show her. (Alvin and Claire enter)

Girl: (Hastily) Mr. Philips, I saw a man pass here several times; then he asked for your wife.... he asked whether I didn't see her coming out.

Alvin: Oh, it must be Ely, her brother.

Girl: No, Mr. Philips, I know her brother, it wasn't him.

Alvin: She has another one. Thanks, Eva.
(he gives her a coin)

Girl: (stares at him somehow astonished, then grasping with her childish instinct his position, she utters) You are a gentleman... (and she walks out)

(Nancy and David come in)

Alvin: Look who is here, and I was sure you went to the movies with Mathilda.

Nancy: Don't try to get rid of me by inventing appointments for me with my sister. If you want to stay alone with an old friend, just be a man and say so, and if I'll want to go to the movies, I'll find my way without my sister, compreneз?

Alvin: (softly) Excuse me, Nancy, I did not mean to drive anyone out of my house; it was just what Mathilda told me. If she lied, it isn't my fault.

Nancy: I suppose so.

David: Whatever it is, it would do no harm to take a walk now; and if we walk as far as a movie, we shall step in anyhow. I know how you feel about it, Alvin, but to me it seems that if it weren't for the movies, ninety percent of the people would commit suicide, including myself and your wife.

Alvin: I agree with you on that, David. It is our misery at home that drives us somewhere, where we hope to find some distraction, but we walk out more empty and more foolish than before we stepped in, and yet, we go again and again.

David: That's just it, because you have no other place where to put yourself.

Nancy: A fine philosophy you have. If I should go anywhere just to escape something, I would rather commit suicide. I don't care what you say, but if I go somewhere, I certainly enjoy myself, and if you don't know how to

enjoy life, it is nobody's fault. Well, let's go. Good-by, and if you wouldn't be fools, you would make the best of it right now... (she goes out)

David: (following her) If you'll listen to her advice, you'll be all right. He-he. Good-by (goes out)

Alvin: Excuse me, Claire, for my unexpected visitors, he e it might be rude, but there is some truth in what she said.

Claire: What she said does not interest me, Alvin. But is it true what you said?

Alvin: I can't help saying so. There are moments when I feel I could run somewhere unknown to myself. I am afraid, Claire, that I'll do it. I have considered many a time my love for the child, but it would be better now than later. A child observes everything, and the sooner I'll leave, the better it will be for all of us.

Claire: If it is your decision, then no one, I think, has a right to interfere; but one must think things over very carefully, for once you make a move it is not easy to turn back.

Alvin: I know it, but it seems to me that there is no other way left. I am afraid, Claire, if I'll stay longer, something might happen.

Claire: I don't understand you, Alvin. You don't mean it has gone so far.

Alvin: It has. I don't know what to tell you, Claire, but something is wrong, something is going to happen. Everything is so dark, so hopeless... why did it

have to happen to me? My God, I'll go off my mind, I've kept it a secret till now. I was ashamed to let anybody know, but I can't disguise it any longer. I feel so much alone, so tired.

Claire: (steps towards him, puts her hand on his head, pressing it to herself, speaking softly) Oh, you big baby! Are you really so lonesome? Why must you keep to yourself anyhow? The gang keeps on asking for you many times. They think you are too happy here to come around, but since that isn't so, it would do you no harm to come over once in a while. Landy has finished a new painting, and we are going to have a little party next Sunday. Shall we expect you?

Alvin: I don't think I'll come, Claire; a party won't do me any good. It makes no difference, whether it is a party, a movie or a concert - I don't want to run away from things; I want to free myself, and if I do go anywhere, I should like to go with a true sense of joy, do you understand?

Claire: Joy! joy! I have heard that many times, but I have not seen it much on human faces. There are only moments, so it does not matter where we get it and how...

Alvin: Please - please, do not speak that way; I thought you were different... I...

Claire: Well,.... I was... I had my beautiful dreams too, but it was Mathilda whom you fancied, not me... and I don't blame you. It is the dangerous ways that are

always alluring; safe places cause no thrills. This is they mystery of life, and we pay for it.

Alvin: Whatever it is, we pay too much for it.

Claire: Whatever you say, there is one thing sure, we cannot live apart. We are social animals, and we must have someone to talk to.

Alvin: Right, but you cannot always be on the go, and when chosen one as a life companion, you want that one to listen to you, to share with you, to have faith in you and the main thing, to help you hope - but it is not so. It is too damn different, and if nothing should occur to liberate me of such disappointment in a friend at home, I shall commit suicide.

Claire: Now, don't talk childishly, it might not be as terrible as all that.

Alvin: God, what else would you want to happen? Didn't you hear Nancy denying the appointment with her? Didn't you hear the girl? - There was a telephone call before, I answered, and telling me - it was the wrong party, he hung up... I suppose you still think that I am a jealous little boy, ha? But please, believe me, Claire, that I don't care at all about her way of trying to fix things up. It does not hurt me any more, but it hurts to know that you are being thought a fool - that is disgusting!

Mathilde: (comes in suddenly) Oh, look who is here, and I thought that Nancy would be here. She never comes on time.

Alvin: Why then to you make appointments with her?

Mathilda: Well, since I have no intentions of spending my evenings at home, I might as well go with my sister to the movies.

Alvin: Very good, very good.

Mathilda: I wonder why you came so unexpectedly, Claire?

Claire: I had just left the dentist, and Alvin met me on the way.

Mathilda: And I thought, that my husband would like to have a good time while I am out.

Claire: You don't have to speak that way, Mathilda. If something is on your mind, just tell me, and I will go this minute.

Mathilda: (cunningly) Why, was it you speaking on the telephone before in a mannish voice? He - he

Claire: (somehow firghtened) What do you mean?

Mathilda: H'he - oh - nothing... but why keep it a secret?

Alvin: Stop that nonsense, Mathilda. I warn you to stop it. I hate it!

Claire: (deeply insulted) My goodness, what secrets does she mean? What is it?

Mathilda: (changing her attitude) He, you foolish girl, you,can't you take a joke? He-he - and what if it should be true, I don't care, why not? If not, when you are young, when then?

Claire: It depends much upon you, my dear, to turn this joke into a reality; but believe it or not, it is vulgar to talk that way, even if it is meant to be a joke.

Mathilda: Can you imagine! I never thought you were a saint, I always considered you a liberal person.

Claire: To be liberal does not mean that one has to be dissolute.

Mathilda: Listen, Claire, I won't stand for any insults in my own home, even from a lady that happens to be a friend of - my husband.

Claire: If this lady (referring to herself) would not respect the presence of the one whom you call husband, I would then tell you something that would make you see yourself quite as I do.

Mathilda: But you will have to respect this gentleman somewheres else, not here, do you get that?

Alvin: My friends may come to me whenever they please.

Mathilda: You leave it to mamma - he (slyly) Come, Claire, what's the use of quarreling? Why not come to the movies? They're showing a nice picture and a rather handsome actor. We would not quarrel there, I am sure, he-he.

Claire: (looks at her critically, then turns to Alvin) Yes, Alvin, I understand you now... Good night (at the door to Mathilda) Well, come, if you are going, though our ways are quite different....

Mathilda: I think I would rather stay. I guess they will show the same picture to-morrow too, and I am kind of tired now.

Claire: Very well, Good night, then. (exit)

Mathilda: Say, Alvin, I never knew that pretty girls keep you company while I am away. I smean it -- I am rather jealous...

Alvin: Yes...

Mathilda: I bet you don't believe me, do you... (she sits on his lap, coquetishly) do you, or not?

Alvin: (monotone) Please, Mathilda, don't behave this way. If you could only see yourself as I do, you would understand how ugly it looks. Why should you act this way towards me? Why?

Mathilda: (jumps up) All right, then, no matter what you do, you are wrong. Well, well...

Alvin: Because you are doing it as a favor, just as you might do it for anybody else. Why can't you, at least, understand that you can't fool me. Do I really look so stupid?

Mathilda: What do you mean - fool you? If you are a liar, it doesn't mean somebody else is.

Alvin: (takes her by the shoulders, imploringly) Look into my eyes, Mathilda. Tell me, why did you have to say that you had an appointment with your sister? What was the sense of it?

Mathilda: What do you want? If she didn't come, it isn't my fault.

Alvin: But she did come. She was here with David, and both knew of no appointment. Have you no sense of shame?

Mathilda: (haughty) Well, what do you want then?

Alvin: (pensively) Everything till now has been pleasant. I have endured it for years. Now you have begun to lie. Telling me lies, Mathilda - how will it end?

Mathilda: What did I lie to you about? What did I lie about? I told you that I was going with Nancy. You didn't see me going out with somebody else, did you?

Alvin: I shall not wait till then, no. I am afraid of a lie more than of a gun. I will not be responsible for what may happen. I hate it! I hate your ways, I tell you!

Mathilda: Look at the face he is making, just like a murderer.

Alvin: I know, I know. I have developed the look of a wolf, always on the watch, always in fear being betrayed. I am ashamed to raise my head before my friends. My God, what torture! What have you done to me, Mathilda?

Mathilda: Now, please, be quiet and don't wake the child up. I know your ways, don't worry, I have had enough of it.

Alvin: What do you know, Mathilda? What else would you invent to disguise your dishonesty? Say it all, and be done with it! Finish it, I tell you!!!

Mathilda: Yes, I will tell you - that if you don't stop torturing me, I'll call in the police, the neighbors. This is the last time I am going to stand for it!

Alvin: I see, I understand it all now. Good God! How I always hated violence, even to teach a fool, and how eagerly I would use it at this time if I were not chained by that cursed civilization of ours. It is your game now. You are protected by public opinion and by law, although you are the most

cruelest creature, as weaklings generally are. I am not trying even to take the child from you, for by all the rules and regulations of society, she belongs to you, but with everything you get now, you shall have my hatred. I shall despise you, every memory of you!

(He puts on his coat and hat, and starts off hesitatingly, as one anxious to say more, but goes nevertheless towards the door, as if driven by some unseen force. The door closes very slowly, and Mathilda remains gazing at the door as after something fading in the distance)

(C U R T A I N F A L L S)

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A C T T W O

At Mr. Dexter's home.

A living room, poorly furnished, an old victrola in a corner, on top of which is a cheap radio, the carpet on the floor is quite faded with years of dust.

Daniel: (listens to the radio, looks a while at Mathilda and calls her impulsively) Come here, won't you sit down?

Mathilda: Not now, Daniel. Please, not now.

Daniel: But I want to talk to you. Stop the music, will you.

Mathilda: (shuts off the radio nd walks over to Dan)

Daniel: (pulls her over towards himself and seats her on his lap)

Mathilda: (wants to move off but meets his reproving look, and remains sitting awhile)

Daniel: Now, how do you like the job? No monkey business with me, Ha, I should say not.

Mathilda: Of course - that's why you are a lawyer.

Daniel: It is not the law, my dear girl, that does these things, it is politics that help. Of course, not every attorney could do it, but if you know where to pull the strings you'll get anything. It's a good start that a young lawyer has to have, the rest will follow. I'll bet you, that another lawyer would never do things so quickly and smoothly, even if you paid him a good price.

Mathilda: Why, I think that the law would help me to collect support for the child without going into trouble with any attorney.

Daniel: But you forget, however, that if he comes with a lawyer for a hearing, and he claims that he is out of work at present, they would certainly give him a break.

Mathilda: And what if he engages a lawyer now?

Daniel: Ha-ha, you just leave it to me now; he doesn't stand a chance with me. There is one thing for him to do: to pay what he owes you, or enjoy a cell in jail.

Mathilda: I wouldn't care if they let him go; it's the money I need.

Daniel: Well, if he doesn't like it, he will find some one to help him. Don't worry.

Mathilda: I couldn't help it, could I?

Daniel: Of course you couldn't, darling. Why should you bear the whole responsibility of the child? Ha! Now, we better stop talking about him altogether, I fell kind of jealous when you talk about that man... that way...

Mathilda: Really, I never thought of it, he?

Daniel: Why, you could have guessed it beforehand. You don't think I am your friend just for the sake of putting some one into jail, do you? I wouldn't do it for somebody else if they would pay me a hundred dollars, though I didn't ask you even for a cent, - you know that.

Mathilda: I told you that I haven't any money.

Daniel: And I didn't ask you for any, did I?

Mathilda: Then, why do you talk so much...

Daniel: Oh well, let's forget it (changing his tone) Say, tell me, Mathilda, what does you room look like? You know, I haven't see n it yet. I'll bet you are more comfortable than in your old palace...

Mathilda: Well, I am satisfied.

Daniel: You said something... some Mathilda, I want to take a look at it. It must be nice there-n't?

Mathilda: Don't be childish, please. I just wantto take a look at it. Can't a friend see you room?

Mathilda: All right, go in there... I...

Daniel: (looks at her cautiously) I did not know that you were so scared, indeed. (he takes her firmly under arm) Just for a few minutes, Mathilda...

Mathilda: (looks a while undecided, and reluctantly goes with him into the bedroom)

Claire: (comes in leading the child) A little girl like you shouldn't go so far from the house: you must play near your own home.

Beatrice: Why does the little boy with his bicycle play there?

Claire: Well, the little boy is near his house, and you must play near your house.

Beatrice: But I like to ride on the bicycle, too.

Claire: When your mother will stary and watch you, then you may go.

Beatrice: But my mother says I am a big girl (raises her arms) you see? Nobody has to watch me.

Claire: Fine, fine... is grandma home?

Beatrice: She is in the grocery

Claire And where is mother?

Beatrice: I don't know... may be in the kitchen (she calls) Mm, Mm....

Mathilda: (from a distant room) Who is there?

Beatrice: Come, ma, a lady wants to see you (she hops out, singing) "I ride on the bicycle"

Mathilda: (comes back) Oh hello, why so unexpectedly? Aren't you working today?

Claire: (sharp) No! Today is a holiday for me.

Mathilda: What kind of a holiday is it specially for you?

Claire: A very special one, indeed! I am celebrating today because I took your husband out of a place where you had placed him.

Mathilda: Me? Why me?

Claire: Who then did it, the mayor?

Mathilda: Say, Claire, I don't like to be spoken to this way. I owe no one an apology. I know what I am doing.

Claire: No, you don't know what you are doing. You don't realize, Mathilda, what it means to do a thing like that! My God! Just imagine Alvin sitting in a police wagon locked with the most fallen creatures... I just arrived as he was being transfereed from the Municipal Court to jail. He had only time to peep through that little window hole before the wagon started... Oh, Mathilda, how could you do it! If you could only see his frightened look! Oh God,

(she bursts into tears) He looked just like a forlorn child (she dries her tears) How could you do it, I ask you?

Mathilda: (somewhe shaken) Why, I didn't do it on purpose. I was just going over to the court to complain about his neglecting to support his child. They told me to sign a paper, but I didn't know what they were going to do.

Claire: Then why didn't you come when he phoned you?

Mathilda: How do you know that? I... I did not have the money to pay for him anyhow...

Claire: You needed no money to save him. Say that you just didn't want to go!

Mathilda: Well, I told you once that I owe no one any apology. Let him share the responsibility; it is his child just as well as mine.

Claire: He knows it better then you do; but what can he do, when he is not working at present. Don't you know that he will pay you everything he owes you as soon as he finds something to do?

Mathilda: If he is not working, where does he get money for his own expenses?

Claire: He has friends.

Mathilda: Well, if he has such good friends, they can go so far as to help him support his child, too.

Claire: Of course they will. A friend is not a wife, my dear, and a wife now-a-days is far from being a friend. (Bitterly) That is why a wife who has

slept five years with a man in one bed, can so easily put him in jail for a couple of dollars.

Mathilda: (angrily) Don't give me any lectures, it is not your business! Wherever he gets the means to support himself, let him also get the means to support his child - that's plain...

Claire: And what are you doing for your child? Living with your parents? You can go to work instead of wasting your days foolishly.

Mathilda: (cynically) Let them work for their husbands who are cockeyed. I can afford to stay home.

Claire: You are right. One must certainly be cockeyed not to see how low and vulgar one has gone...

Mathilda: (raising her voice) I tell you... (her phrase is cut off by a violent crying of the child who is brought in by several neighbors. She jumps up, seizing the child) What's the matter... My God, what's the matter?

1st lady: Don't get frightened now, it's just a little scratch on her knee, that's all.

2nd lady: No wonder,- to be sure,- a girl should like to ride on a bicycle, - and so careless as she is. Thank heaven, the driver of the truck turned to the right, otherwise it would be your hard luck.

1st lady: Thank goodness, she escaped falling off the bicycle. Put some cold water on, and be thankful; it's only a scratch on her knee.

Claire: (goes into the kitchen)

Daniel: (comes from the other room, walks straight towards the child and examines her foot) What's the trouble?

1st lady: Didn't I tell you? A milk truck, I said, threw her over.

Daniel: (takes his note book out) A milk truck? That's fine (he notes it in the book) What's the first name?

1st lady: How should I know? The grocery man, I guess, knows him. He comes there every day, right on the corner.

Daniel: (marks it down) That's fine. Has the truck gone already?

2nd lady: Why, sure. The driver said, there is nothing to it...

Daniel: Is that so? Can you imagine it! He-he. Just come and show me where it happened and who that grocery man is that knows him. He will find out pretty soon whether there is really nothing to it. (he goes off quickly with the neighbors)

Claire: (comes in from the kitchen with a wet towel) Where does it hurt you, darling?

Beatrice: Here, right here (she points to her knee)

Claire: (puts the towel on) You see, I told you that a little girl must play near her own house.

Mrs. Dex: (rushes in alarmed) What has happened? What has happened? Good God, my darling, my angel, where is the doctor? Why don't you call a doctor?

Mathilda: Please, mother, don't make so much noise, you frighten me more than the accident did.

Mrs. Dex: Well, what else would you say? As soon as I step out of the house, everything goes topsy-turvy, I should like to see you someday having your own home again and not be so frightened by my alarm. Can you imagine it!

Daniel: (rushes in enthusiastically) Gee! We have a wonderful case, I am telling you, Mathilda. This case is worth money, I wouldn't give it up for a thousand dollars.

Mrs. Dex: What case are you talking about?

Daniel: (more enthusiastic) Can you imagine! The child was riding near the curb and just then, the truck turned the corner and without warning upset the bicycle. Can you imagine how much the company will pay? I'll bet they'll settle for two thousand dollars, but I won't do it. This is a milk trust and we can bleed them, he-he, and how.

Mathilda: But I don't understand, Daniel. How could you make a case of it, when nothing really has happened to the child?

Daniel: Why the child was hurt, wasn't she? (he examines the child's foot as an expert might, is disappointed, stands thinking a while) Wel... we could fix it a little bit... you know, not much, just...

Mathilda: What do you mean?

Daniel: I mean.... (he observes Claire and looks at her distrustfully) Is this young lady a relative?

Mathilda: No, just an acquaintance.

Daniel: M'm... Well, I guess we'll leave it for another time...

Claire: I may be only an acquaintance, - that's true, - but if you plan to do something with that child, then you are plain murderers!! (more furious) You have no right. I am telling you that Alvin will ruin you both.

Daniel: He-he, Alvin?... Who the hell is that guy?

Claire: I guess you will find it out pretty soon, sooner than you expect (she runs off quickly)

Mathilda: I am not very sure of it myself, I am afraid, Dan

Daniel: Why? Of what?

Mr. Dex: (comes in, all remain silent) Why did you become silent all at once? Any secrets?

Mrs. Dex: (who listening all the time attentively to the conversation, wakes up as if from a dream) Are you really so interested to know?

Mr. Dex: Why not?

Mrs. Dex: All right then, we'll send you a telegram. Are you satisfied?

Mr. Dex: All right, come then and give me something to eat, and I'll be able to wait for your telegram.

Mrs. Dex: Get you something there. Supper is not ready yet.

Daniel: (rises to go) Well, I think, we shall lose no time. Take the child and put her to bed; I'll run over to the doctor: he is an expert in this business. We must do it before anyone from the company comes for an investigation.

Mr. Dex: What's going on here? What has happened to the child?

Mrs. Dex: Nothing has happened, and mind your own business.

Mr. Dex: What do you mean nothing? What does that company and doctor business mean?

Mrs. Dex: It means nothing, and don't bother your head about it any more.

Mr. Dex: You will listen to me now, madam. I have gone through plenty with you during my life, but it is too late now to dig up the past for an old mule like me, but what concerns this child, it will be my business to watch, do you get me? You just leave it to this old horse, I'll break your heads if something is going to happen to her.

Daniel: But I see no reason at all why you should quarrel. Just let me explain it to Mr. Dexter, and you will see that he'll be glad of it.

Mr. Dex: Well, say it, if there is anything to be said.

Daniel: Why, of course, the thing is this, Mr. Dexter... Sit down, please...

Mr. Dex: (sits down)

Daniel: You see, it's this way. The child was riding on the bicycle a while ago, and a truck belonging to a big milk company drove by and overturned the bicycle. Nothing happened to the child, of course, but if we can collect a couple of thousand dollars for the sake of the child, I think no one will object (he winks to Mathilda, Mrs. Dexter notices that too)

Mr. Dex. (thinking a while) Well, if that is all, then go ahead (he rises from his chair) I thought something mysterious was going on, the way you spoke. Now come, get me something to eat, I'm starved.

Daniel: Why don't you go Mrs. Dexter (he winks to her) Mr. Dexter does look hungry.

Mrs. Dex: (looks at him grasping the significance of his clever move, and starts off to the kitchen)

Daniel: Be so kind, Mrs. Dexter, as to take the child with you and put her to bed, please.

Beatrice: I don't wanna go to bed. I wanna play outside.

Daniel: No, darling Beatie. If you go to bed, I'll buy you a nice bicycle with a real horn.

Beatrice: All right.

Mrs. Dex: (takes her from Mathilda and carries her off into the other room)

Daniel: Now, we'll have to get busy. As you see, we already got rid of one fool. We can go through with the whole matter so that the old man should not suspect anything.

Mathilda: It is not what the old man would say, Daniel, it is myself that is not ready to do things like that. My God, if something should happen to the child, I would kill myself.

Daniel: Now don't be a fool, please. What could happen with the child? The doctor that does these things for me is an expert. He does that for several lawyers, and thank God, as far as I know, nothing dangerous has ever happened. The thing he does is just not to let the wound heal until the case is over, and as soon as we get the money, the child's health is secured as sure as we all live...

Mathilda: And what if Alvin find out all about it?

Daniel: No worry about that, we'll fix him too. We'll tell him, that as soon as we get the money, we free him of the support of the child. After all we have to consider him too, you know. He is not rich, and even when he works, it's quite difficult for him to support you and himself separately. I guess I am right, particularly, on this point.

Mathilda: But I know him. He wouldn't consent, - it's no use.

Daniel: (laughs mockingly) You leave it all to me, and everything will be O.K. You may be sure that his sweetheart hasn't enough money to bail him out, as often as I can put him into jail. We should be the greatest fools that ever lived, if we give up such a swell chance. It's really a treasure!

Mathilda: I am not sure, Daniel, I don't want to be rude. After all, he is human too. It's only the couple of dollars that I wanted, and since it was paid - no matter by whom - I don't want him to go to jail, you must know that.

Daniel: But we can't do it differently, if he is going to be stubborn. It's only until the case is over, and then you free him altogether of any responsibility. Don't be foolish. After all is over, he'll be grateful to you.

(Manny and David come in)

Daniel: (ignores them, continuing in the same manner) Well, I am running out after a second to call the doctor to come immediately. Meanwhile, see that

no one should touch.... h'm... well, be brave, and don't loose courage. Everything is going to be fine. I'll be back in a minute. (goes out quickly)

Nancy: Where are they all running to? Did Claire, too, run away from here?

Mathilda: Why do you ask?

Nancy: I was sitting on the steps and I noticed her running as from a fire. She had no time to look around when I called her, as if she had the cramps.

David: Then he must have had a tooth ache.

Nancy: May-be. Didn't you hear him running after the doctor?

David: Really, Mathilda, who is sick here?

Mathilda: (disagreeably) What do you want to know for? I don't have to tell you everything.

David: God forbid, I don't want to know everything... I was just wondering... I see no one is sick here, and there he runs for a doctor. Tell me, my dear Mathilda, isn't this the same gentleman that you used to come over with sometimes?

Mathilda: Why, don't you recognize him?

David: I certainly do, it was he who didn't recognize me. He wouldn't even say hello.... He must have have gotten rich - your cavalier.

Nancy: (sarcastically) That's how it is with these fellows. When they hurry after a doctor, they forget where they once enjoyed a good supper and a fine dessert added to it...

David: (as if discovering something) Say, Mathilda, before even you've divorced?

Mathilda: Now, stop that, will you?

David: Don't get so excited, please. I didn't say a thing... It just reminds me about an innocent girl that came to a doctor asking him what the sickness was that had made her nauseous for a couple of days, and the doctor, after examining her, told her, that she would have to wait another eight and a half months and the sickness would discover itself... ha-ha-ha

Mathilda: Will you stop your jokes. Please, Nancy, take him away.

David: What do you mean away. I came here to have supper. I mean a real supper.

Nancy: A real supper, as if he never eats a real one at home.

David: I wouldn't say that, but if I recall, it is two weeks that you haven't turned on the gas in the kitchen.

Nancy: I haven't, no I haven't, and what is there in the ice box, if not a good piece of chicken?

David: It's about two weeks that she keeps on telling me a story about a chicken stay in the ice box until spring time. Maybe she'll lay some eggs: then we'll have eggs for the summer.

Nancy: If that'll happen, then I promise you a fresh supper for the summer.

David: I guess I'll sooner get eggs from the chicken in the ice box, then a fresh cooked meal from you.

Nancy: (takes him by the arm) Now, let's go into the kitchen I have developed an appetite myself talking so much about a tasty bite - he-he. (both go into the kitchen)

(A taxi is heard arriving)

Alvin: (comes in hurriedly) Where is my child? Where is my child?

Mathilda: (somehow shaken) Nothing has happened Alvin, Beatrice is all right. How do you know of the... little accident

Alvin: Claire just phoned me. Where is the child, please?

Mathilda: There... in the bedroom. She is all right.

Alvin: (rushes into the other room)

Daniel: (comes in hastily) Now, I have fixed it all...

Mathilda: (disturbed) Sh... sh... he is here. She has told him, probably, everything. Now do you see, I am telling you to...

Daniel: Don't get frightened. Once I make up my mind, nothing can stop me. You better listen...

Alvin: (comes back, carrying Beatrice, looks at them with a penetrating look)

Daniel: (gaining courage gradually, says) Well, why do you look so dramatic, Mr. Philips?

Alvin: I want to observe well the faces of the two human creatures whose heads could invent such a barbarous deed as that. Had this occured at my home, I would have taken you by your neck and thrown you down all the stairs. But this is the home of my wife, and it is her business to select her own friends. We juage a person by his friends, and his deed is the reflection on his conscience. You are beasts to agree on such

a thing, and I am happy that I came in time to save her from your clutchers. (he starts off towards the door)

(Both, Mathilda and Daniel block his way quickly, holding on to the child)

Alvin: (makes no resistance in order not to frighten the child, but he looks at both of them with a fiery look)

Mathilda: (remains in the position holding the child not uttering a word)

Daniel: (playing the bravado) You can't frighten me with that look. What we want to do with this child is none of your business. A father who doesn't pay support has little to say about his child - unless you want to go back to prison, you may attempt to get back her; but I would advise you not to take any chances, do you get me?

Alvin: (releases the child from his arms not taking off his stern look of the lawyer)

Mathilda: (carries off the child into the second room as if escaping from some danger)

Daniel: (with a sardonic smile) That's the way to act, my dear man. Why make a fool of yourself, when you can turn it to your own profit. If you would just not be so hasty and listen to reason, you might find it not so bad as you imagined. Now let's not fool ourselves. You are not rich, and if this case should happen to turn out right, you would be free of all responsibility to the child. That's more, I take it upon myself to have a talk with Mathilda to return

to you the few dollars that have already been paid. Now, what do you say to that?

Alvin: I say, if I could, I would cut your tongue out, but I can't do it. You are the law, aren't you? You are trying to bribe me against my child. Are you really so brainless, Mr. Attorney, or you are merely a skunk?

Daniel: I meant to be a sport, but if you are a fool, I'll talk to you as to one. Money or no money, you will have to keep quiet. If not, my dear fellow, you'll keep quiet in a cell at the penitentiary. You have to decide it right now.

Alvin: Well, here is my decision (he strikes him heavily on the jaw. A fight starts between the two. Mrs. & Mr. Dexter, Mathilda, Nancy and David rush in trying to part them, but they don't succeed.)

Mrs. Dex: (then runs to the window and shouts) Police, police! (A few neighbors appear, then a policeman comes in, grabs one by the collar, and parts them, looks ironically at both heroes, then turns to Alvin)

Policeman: What's your name?

Alvin: Alvin Philips

Policeman: And yours?

Daniel: (takes out a card from his vest pocket, gives it to the policeman with an air of importance)

Policeman: My God, what's the trouble, Mr. Snellen?

Daniel: This rascal was arrested yesterday for not paying support to his wife and child. Some friends helped him to get out, and he came here to make a scandal. Fortunately, I was here, and was trying to protect the

woman, as I think any gentleman would do, and here - this is what has come of it - he started a fight.

Policeman: (looks at Alvin with a sarcastic smile then turns to Mathilda) Now, what do you say, madam?

Mathilda: I wasn't in the room, officer, I don't think... that...

Daniel: Why, of course, as soon as I saw trouble brewing, I shipped her out of the room; in fact, the child was on the verge of collapse, if we hadn't gotten her out of his hands. (To Mathilda) Am I right? (not waiting for any reply) Why, of course, there is no question about it...

Mr. Dex: But what is going on here anyhow? Let me understand it, you mean to say that Alvin...

Mrs. Dex: You just don't ask anything

Mr. Dex: Why, but I hear

Daniel: (foxy) My dear Mr. Dexter, if you'll leave it to justice, then the guilty will get his punishment. What we want is order and respect for the law.

Policeman: (to Alvin) You have a good case, my boy.

Alvin: Yes, I know, but this case requires a thorough investigation, because this Mr. Snellen is a criminal.

Daniel: (excited, posing as if before a jury) Officer, I beg you to make note of what he said. Will you kindly do it for me? Thank you!

(he makes a deep bow before the policeman)

Policeman: (makes some notations in a little book)(smiling friendly)

Alvin: Remember Mathilda, I will somehow sit thru a term in jail. God may bless you for doing such a noble thing

as to frame me up, but if something shall happen to my child, (tears come to his eyes) I will revenge myself even while in jail.

Policeman: Well, my boy, come. You too, Mr. Smellen.

Daniel: (with pride) Why of course, of course.

(The three of them start off towards the door)

Claire: (Appears suddenly, shocked by this unexpected scene, she exclaims) Alvin! What's this?!

Alvin: (with bitter smile) Your good intentions, my dear Claire, were of no avail. It seems as if this lawful consert of mine, likes me better in jail... well, good-bye. (He goes out, Daniel and policeman after him)

Claire: (After a short pause, emphasizing every word) You have gone too far, Mathilde. You have broken the record for sen sation, but you forget, however, that I am still free, - how did you once express yourself? "You leave it to mamma" H'm? And you may depend on this mamma too. I will treat you, my dear, with the same gloves! Now remember! (she goes off quickly)

C U R T A I N

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A C T T H R E E

SCENE ONE

The same as act two. Nancy and David are in the room.

Nancy: (looks out of the window now and then) Well, I don't see anybody yet. I am getting tired looking through the window.

David: Don't look then.

Nancy: But what could be the reason they are not back yet.

David: Don't worry, they are not going to sleep there, I am sure. The court closes at five, and they have no beds to sleep in.

Nancy: But, they went there early in the morning.

David: Well, perhaps, their case hasn't come up yet.

Nancy: I hope they don't postpone it for another day.

David: And what would you lose if they would postpone it?

Nancy: I know that you don't care a bit, but I do.

David: Ha, I wonder how much you expect to get out of this business for all your interest?

Nancy: You can never tell.

David: I should say I can. I know from experience that a dog won't share his meat with any other dog. My mother used to teach me, that

> If your sister is rich
> Then happy is she;
> And if the dog is woolly
> Then warm he'll be.

Nancy: But there is a difference between one dog and another.

David: I should think so... but if your sister is as good as you are, then you may be sure that as soon as she gets the money and marries that crazy good-for-nothing, she would not even permit you to come near her threshold.

Nancy: Do you think that everyone is like your family?

David: Ha-ha-ha, just look who is speaking against my family. Now tell me, darling, did my sister also come visiting us with some cavalier?

Nancy: Hey! Where do you come in-with your sister's bandy legs. To go out with a nice man, you must have legs, do you understand?

David: No, my sweetheart, to go out with a scoundrel when you have a decent husband, you need no legs at all.

Nancy: Oh, what's the use of talking with you. I wouldn't get much out of it anyhow. It's my sister who has luck. Good God, I'll bet she would have lived through her life without even dreaming of a car, and now we'll have some good time. I'll take a ride with them every Sunday.

David: You certainly have imagination.

Nancy: And what imagination!

David: My mother used to say, "Don't say you've got it, till you really have it."

Nancy: Stop telling me your mother's sayings, will you.

David: All right, then, I'll tell you my own. "Just don't get excited, darling, because the car is still somewheres in the factory."

(the door bell rings)

Nancy: There, someone is coming, didn't I tell you?

David: (steps out to open the door, and return with Mr. Dexter)

Mr. Dex: (goes towards the kitchen not looking up at any one.)

Nancy: Father, well, what's new?

Mr. Dex: (stops in the middle of the room, turns his look towards Nancy, not uttering a word)

Nancy: What's the matter, pa? What's the trouble?

Mr. Dex: (dries his tears, unable to control himself)

David: What has happened? What are you crying for?

Mr. Dex: Why did you do that? What did you want with the child.

Nancy: My Goodness, what has happened to the child?

Mr. Dex: You have all kept it a secret from the old fool, hey? You have crippled the child for a couple of dollars, he? You beasts, - beasts, that you are!

Mrs. Dex: (comes in crying) What shall we do now, what shall we do?

Mr. Dex: Put a rope around your neak, you old wretch, and throw yourself into the river, and may God never forgive you fot it! Just wait till Alvin gets on his feet again,- he'll teach you all a lesson. I wish to God he would, and I'll help him. I should say I will. I'll revenge myself on you for all my unhappy life. I will.

Nancy: Just look at the hero he has all of a sudden become

Mrs. Dex: Quiet, you now. I have enough without you. You better go and call Alvin. If he is home, let him come right away.

Nancy: What do you mean Alvin should come here, and where is Mathilda?

Mr. Dex: She is now where she belongs. They have put her in jail together with that crook - they did - now they'll get a taste of it. God upholdsthe right - don't worry.

Mrs. Dex: Why don't you keep quiet? Have you the heart to speak like that now?

Nancy: But I don't understand. What have they put them in jail for?

David: I suppose because they forgot to say their evening prayer, and to get a deposit from the milk trust in charge.

Nancy: Stop your foolish jokes now.

David: It's no joke at all. Did you really think that a company would pay money for the good looks of your darling sister with her "beauty contest" legs? and her honorable representative? A company investigates a case like this quite carefully before it pays a cent, my dear.

Mrs. Dex: What is the use of being wise now. You better go and call Alvin. The clerk advised me, that it depends much on Alvin to get her out. Go and call him.

Mr. Dex: He would be the greatest fool to do anything for her. When he called her from court asking her to release him, you gave her good advice to ignore him. You listened to that crook, damn him, and now you are not ashamed to send for Alvin to assist you.

Mrs. Dex: What shall I do then, let her stay in jail?

Mr. Dex: Why not? Let her taste what it means to put someone else in jail.

Mrs. Dex: A father to talk like that against his own child! It's something that was never heard of before. One must be a brute to talk like that.

Mr. Dex: Against one's own child you are not supposed to, he? What difference does it make whose crime it is, as long it is a crime? When I saw Alvin appear on the witness stand in his prison clothes, I felt my heart jump out of its place. I felt like running over to him and begging forgiveness.

Mrs. Dex: Well, why shouldn't you now go to him? I know he liked you more then all of us. Maybe to please you, he'd do it.

Mr. Dex: (hard) I will not go, I say. Leave him rest a while after suffering through two months of torture on account of you. He'll probably see to it himself not to have her stay in jail if it simply depends upon his good will. If you would only have been as good as he is, we might not have come to all this suffering, I'm sure.

Nancy: You mean to say that Alvin is out of jail?

David: And what do you think they would do anyhow? The truth rises as oil does on top of water. Yes, my dear, it seems as if you will have to ride in the subway on Sundays too - he-he-, unless you would like to walk... then...

Nancy: Stop your joking, I tell you. You better go across to the candy store, and call up Alvin. Don't you understand what's going on?

David: I do, I certainly do, but what can I do about it?

Nancy: Oh well! What can I accomplish with a dumbbell like you? Let me have a nickel, quick!

David: I think I haven't got any change (to Mr. Dex) Have you a nickel?

Mr. Dex: (takes out a dime and gives it to him)

David: Oh, a dime?.... I guess I have a dime myself... (he puts the dime into his pocket) All right... I guess you owe me one nickel from last week. (he goes off after Nancy)

Mrs. Dex: (to Mr. Dex) Well, what's the use of being so upset? Worrying will do no good. We have to get her out, and then we'll see if there is any chance, they might... (the door bell rings) Here, go quick and open the door.

Mr. Dex: (Goes out, and comes right back) It's him. God help me to be able to face him (he sits down, not raising his head)

Alvin (comes in) Hello!

Mrs. Dex: (very friendly) We were just talking about you. It is very nice of you to come. It seems as if God sent you here on purpose, I suppose as our saviour.

Alvin: Oh, I don't pretend to be as good as that, I only didn't want to become anyone's persecutor, and I am not, indeed, anyone's enemy.

Mr. Dex: Thank you, thank you, Alvin, for saying a good word. You are a saint, I should say: we are not worthy of you.

Alvin: It is good to know that there is one person, though, who sees your side, but this is not the reason why

I have come. I just wanted the address of the hospital where my child is. I just want to see her, that's all I wanted.

Mrs. Dex: But it is late, Alvin: they let you in there only between ten and two. Here is the address. (takes a piece of paper from her purse and hands it to him)

Alvin: I think I'll go over there just the same. Maybe after I'll explain that I didn't see her for such a long time. Oh, if I only could see her again healthy and normal as she was.

Mr. Dex: Let's hope for the best, my son. Don't lose courage. A young man like you will overcome everything.

Mrs.Dex: And what do you think Mathilda wants? It's a pity to look at her. She wouldn't part for a second from the child. A nice time we have all had - you are away, - the child in the hospital, - and the mother in jail (she breaks into tears)

Alvin: (moved to tears himself) Well... it seems (he makes a motion as if trying to avoid an unpleasant memory) Oh, what is the use of talking? I don't want to say anything on her account, but no one could have wronged her more than she did herself. But what is the good of reproach now? Perhaps she knew what she wanted. Well, I'll say good-bye (he starts off towards the door)

Mrs. Dex: So you are going already?

Alvin: What have I got to do here? I did not come to pay any visits nor to be disagreeable. I just wanted the address of the hospital to know where my child is: that's all.

Mrs. Dex: Yes, some great fortune it is for a child to grow up when parents don't live together.

Alvin: Well, the mother didn't give it much thought when she felt like going out for a good time till two and three o'clock in the morning. She suffered little when she used to lie in bed till late in the morning and the child was without a drop of milk till ten o'clock. At that time you didn't find it necessary to give your advice, but now you do.

Mrs. Dex: Can you imagine? How tragic he makes it! What if she did come home a little late once in a century? Did she do anything wrong? Did you catch her with anybody else?

Alvin: (with a critical smile) H'm! If I would be disposed to tell jokes, he, I would tell you about the farmer who wet his pants and did not feel it. You are pretty naive - forgive me for saying so, or maybe you are not so innocent as you want to make the impression, but all the same, it was you who has eaten the rotten egg.

Mrs. Dex: Yes, to be sure... and...

Nancy: (comes in) Here, Claire told me on the telephone that you are here, but I thought she was fooling me

Alvin: There are still some people who don't make it their business to fool other people.

Nancy: She asked you to wait here for her. She is coming soon. She wants to go over with you to see Beatrice.

Alvin: Thank you.

Money: She also told me something about Mathilda, but I couldn't quite understand her. I think she asked whether she is here already.

Mrs. Dex: You should have told her that if she feels like making fun of anybody's ill luck, she should at least have sense enough not to come here, in this house. It's a free country, it is. So shameless!

Alvin: You should be the last one to judge Claire. She has done nothing to be ashamed of and especially you should not slight her name.

Mrs. Dex: That so? You talk as if she is a saint. Lives with a married man in the same room and doesn't give a darn for anybody. Can you imagine?

Alvin: Claire is too dear a friend of mine to discuss her with you, but I just want to remind you, that still it is better to stay together with a friend openly than to give oneself to every damn fool just for a good time. I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but since you have the nerve to take that pious attitude, then I want you to know that to judge somebody else, one must take good care of his own behavior.

Mrs. Dex: Sure enough, if a man is looking for trouble he'll always find it.

Alvin: Oh well, I can expect no justice from the daughter's mother, I suppose we'll leave it for some other time. There are a few important things I want you to tell Mathilda, when you see her, and that is that I am

going to sue her for a divorce soon, and if she has some sense of feeling, she won't try to create any difficulties.

Mrs. Dex: And what do you think she will do? Embalm you? Do it if that is what you have decided.

Alvin: Of course I will, and she will have to admit to everything. I'll file the application. I desire the child to stay with me.

Mrs. Dex: That so?!

Alvin: Well, I am sorry, but she will have to decide it soon. If she creates no difficulties then I'll agree that she may come to see the child whenever she wishes. If not, then the court will grant me the child just the same, because a mother who allows her child's foot to be poisoned for money, cannot command the confidence of the court.

Mrs. Dex: And until the trial is over she would have to stay in jail?

Alvin: I am very sorry for her, but you can't blame me for wanting to be secured with my child.

David: (runs in) Here, you see. I did well waiting in the candy store. Mathilde just called. She said everybody should go to the hospital.

Alvin: Is it about the child? (he makes an attempt to leave)

David: Honest, I forgot to ask her.

Nancy: Once a mule - always a mule.

David: But she was too excited - she wouldn't even wait for an answer. I am telling you, she said: Everybody to the hospital, that's all.

Mrs. Dex: Now, I don't know what to think of it, so help me God.

Alvin: But I know what to think about it. I imagine that this must be some of Claire's ways of fixing things, It is the work of that girl, Mrs. Dexter, whom you so pathetically failed to approved of.

Mrs. Dex: Well! Well! I suppose you win now. Are you going?

Alvin: No, Mrs. Dexter. I have to wait. This girl, Claire, is also interested in seeing the child, I guess you may understand it now...

Mr. Dex: All right, wait if you wish...

(all go out except Alvin and David)

Alvin: Well, why did you get so serious. Why don't you go with him?

David: I envy you, Alvin, for having the courage. I wish I could do the same

Alvin: You don't have to take me as an example, my friend, because everyone's case is different. Everyone has to fight his own battles; but, if you can't take off your tight shoe yourself, nobody, of course, will do it for you.

David: And what if it feels uncomfortable with the new shoes?

Alvin: Then buy a third pair.

David: And what if there is no money to buy?

Alvin: Oh, then really it is quite unpleasant, he-he.

David: But I'll quit some day anyhow. (he walks towards the door)

Alvin: Wait a while, David, since you remained here, I'll ask you to stay a little while longer. I want to call up Claire.

David: Go ahead.

Alvin: (goes,and meets Claire at the door) Here she is, and I just wanted to call you, Well, David, you can go nowif you wish.

David: Yes, I know (he makes a few steps towards the door, turns his head observing Claire) I like your new shoes, Alvin, he-he m'bye...
(goes off embarrassed at his own remark)

Claire: And where is Mathilda?

Alvin: I don't know, she just called from the hospital

Claire: And I thought she would be here first.

Alvin: When did you have a chance to speak to her, and how did she get out?

Claire: As soon as you left to come here, I immediately paid the bail for her through our lawyer.

Alvin: Where did you get so much money?

Claire: The lawyer advised me to be prepared with a sufficient amount of bail for you, but since your bail remained unused, I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to pay for her bail.

Alvin: That's very nice of you, Claire.

Claire: I knew you would feel much better when she would be free.. Well, where are the rest?

Alvin: They have all gone to the hospital.

Claire: Come then, hurry, it might be late.

Alvin: No, Claire, we shall not go now. Their ways are well known to me.... together with her near the child's bed... Oh, these people... They will begin to talk, trying to impress me by some sentiments of theirs. No, Claire, I cannot. I think we should rater wait

Claire: (uncertain) Things happen... may be she means it truly... a person can sometimes change...

Alvin: Oh please, do not try to assist the devil. You know very well that there is no retreat. I don't long for things that ryn away from me. Why should I pick up things that slip out of my hands, when there are plenty of good ones that will cling to you as part of your ownself... I saw a painting some months ago, where the artist seems to touch upon the subject that troubles me so much lately. He pictures a man riding a galloping horse and trying to seize an image of an alluring, beautiful maiden swaying in the air, and exactly such another graceful, lovely girl is being trodden under the feet of that galloping horse; a lind on the edge of the picture says: "On the run for Happiness?... Do you understand, Claire? On the run for happiness. We tread upon happiness with our own feet... then what is the use of running? What is the use?

Claire: Why then are you afraid to face her? To make sure thatone is to practice his ideals, one must not be afraid of a task. On the contrary, one must go and put himself on trial, and if he overcomes any temptation, then he is cured.

Alvin: You are right, dear Claire, we shall go, right now. One must cut out a growth together with the affected flesh and blood, if there is anything left. I'll do it, my Claire, for you...

Claire: (looks at him in a motherly way, taking his hand) And I'll heal you, Alvin... if I can..

Alvin: (soft, gleamingly) Let's go...

(both go off)

CURTAIN

A C T T H R E E

SCENE TWO

A semi-private room in a hospital.
At the left side there is the child laying in a bed surrounded by the whole family.

Opposite, there is another bed where a middle aged woman lies, moving her head uneasily on the pillow, and casting now and then an impatient glance at the crowd which behaves quite noisily.

Nancy: Well, what is the use of waiting; we might as well go.

Mr
Mrs. Dex: Nobody asked you to come, and if you are in a hurry you can go.

Mr. Dex: But the child is tired and sleepy; we can't stay here a whole night.

Nancy: Maybe he wouldn't come anyhow. I know him, he comes of a stubborn lot. He is not the one to give in so easy.

Mrs. Dex: He shouldn't have left him there waiting for that nag of his, and if you would take my advice, someone would even go over to bring him... now is the only time you can make him come.

Nancy: All right, pa, let's go.

Mathilda: (seems to have adopted quite a different tone in her speech, her expression as her movements are distinctly tamed) No, don't do it, Nancy. Alvin will come by himself. I know he loves the child too much not to come... and then... he is not so bad as all that... anyhow...

Mrs. Dex: After all he is still your husband. I don't see why he shouldn't come.

Mr. Dex: You have to see things better, in order to, really see

Mrs. Dex: There, how do you do?... I wish you'd keep your opinions to yourself

Mr. Dex: A lot of good come of your worthy opinion. Here... (he points to the child) a fine deal you have...

Mrs. Dex: Now shut up! Quiet! you old...

Woman: (unable to control herself any longer, rings the bell on the table several time nervously. All remain silent a moment. A nurse comes in)

Nurse: Anybody call?

Woman: (in tears) I can't stand it any longer. Please let them go, let them go...

Nurse: It is really time for you to go; it is against the rules of the hospital to let anyone stay at this hour

Mrs. Dex: But we have to wait here for the father...

Nurse: Yes, I know, and that is why an exception was made, but it doesn't mean that you have to disturb some body's sleep.

Mrs. Dex: All right, we'll be quiet now.

Nurse: I am sorry lady, but you will have to leave at this time.

Mrs. Dex: But I...

Nurse: I am sorry, but that's the order of the superintendent and you cannot stay, madam.

Mathilda: Go mother, please, I'll wait here alone.

Nurse: I am afraid, lady, we cannot allow anyone to remain, I am sorry.

Mathilda: Please, only myself. There will be no more noise.

Nurse: (a while undecided, then shows the rest out)
(All go out whispering "Good night")

Mathilda: (puts her hand on the cushion near the child's head, and looks t the child longingly)

Beatrice: (opens her eyes, slowly, gazing at her mother)

Mathilda: Were you sleeping a bit, darling?

Beatrice: Where is daddy? You say daddy is gonna come?

Mathilda: Yes, darling, daddy is going to be here soon... he will bring you a nice little doll, and then he will tell you a nice story... Do you remember the nice stories he usedto tell you? He-he (tears come to her eyes)

Beatrice: Mother... Why are you crying?

Mathilda: No, no, I am not crying darling, I am just thinking... how good it would be, to listen to your father's stories. We would stay home now... wouldn't we...

Beatrice: (sleepily) H'm? Yes mother... where is daddy?
(she closes her eyes)

Mathilda: (reaches out for the telephone, then looks at the sleeping woman and places carefully back the telephone on the table, then she rises to go)
I am going out in the hall to call daddy. All right, darling? (she notices that the child is asleep)
My darling... (she walks quietly out of the room)

(The telephone begins to ring after a while. The ring must be faint as is usual in a hospital)

The woman: (Raises her head annoyed, she murmurs something dissatisfied and tries to reach the cover of the table. She succeeds with difficulty in getting hold of it, and carefully pulls over the telephone to her side; then drops the receiver with satisfaction and puts it harshly on the table) Darn it... (she hears somebody approaching the door and she turns with a grimace towards the wall)

(Alvin, Claire and the Nurse come in)

Nurse: She is not in. Seems as if she has gone.

Alvin: (Coming nearer to the child, says in a whisper) It's all right miss... thank you, it is perfectly all right.

Nurse: (smiling sympathetically) You won't wake her up...

Alvin: No... no...

Nurse: (puts her table in order, and walks out in a manner as if witnessing some mystery)

Alvin: She is sleeping... If I only lived to see this child with her foot all healed. Perhaps I could some day really begin anew.

Claire: You needn't worry about the child. I have seen the doctor, and he told me that the danger is over. It will heal, he said, entirely... You'll see Alvin, everything will come out right. We'll work together, we will not get tired till we see the child all cured.

Alvin: How good you are Claire! How good it is to have a friend like you. It was of you that I really dreamt all my life, it might be that it is better that all this happened; I will appreciate you now all the more, because I knew the difference...

Claire: Let us hope so, Alvin. You needn't say anything more, and you don't have to apologise for the past. I take you as you are, and I ask nothing from you. I just want to be with you, and sometimes... if you'll want.. but... it is just the same... I'll be a good mother to your child too.

Alvin: There was something hidden in your last words, dear Claire, Tell me, who else has the right to tell me of the most sincere feelings? Tell me, Claire, what do you want?

Claire: (raising her eyes, with a blush in her cheeks) A child...

Alvin: (very tender) Oh, Claire, my dear... my dear wife... (he hugs her tenderly and kisses her)

Mathilda: (comes in, looks at them a while, then gloomily says) Have you been here long?

Alvin: Yes, everyone seems to be gone

Mathilda: It was late. They couldn't stay here any longer, they were not allowed to.

Alvin: Where were <u>you</u> then?

Mathilda: I was going down to call you. I didn't want to wake them up, so I went downstairs. I tried several time to get you, but it was too late. They said you were gone...

Alvin: (looks at the child pensively, and with sad feeling he speaks these last words, more to himself than to Mathilda)

Alvin: Well, so it is Mathilda, when people do awake to a call, they realize then that they are late...
(he automatically takes off his hand from the sleeping child, kisses it, then turns to Claire)
Come now, Claire, there is another day tomorrow, we have to see to it to be on time, always on time...
(To Mathilda) Good night, Mathilda..

Mathilda: (does not say anything. She only looks sullenly after Alvin and Claire as they leave the room)

CURTAIN